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HEALTH

Researchers identify gene pattern linked to homosexuality

Finding supports gay birth theory

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Researchers have identified a gene pattern linked to male homosexuality, adding powerful new evidence to the scientific theory that the tendency to be gay can be inherited.

The finding does not prove homosexuality in males is genetically compelled, but it does show that the sexual orientation is powerfully influenced by inherited genes, said Dean Hamer, principal author of the study appearing today in the journal Science.

"This is the strongest evidence to date that there is an important genetic component to sexual orientation," Hamer said.

Evidence of a gay gene was found by studying the X chromosome in 40 pairs of homosexual brothers. Thirty-three pairs of brothers shared the same pattern variation in the tip of one arm of the chromosome, a region that may have 100 or more individual genes.

Hamer said his lab at the National Cancer Institute is now trying to identify the specific gene shared by the gay brothers.

The study is at least the fourth in recent years to identify possible biological explanations for sexual orientation and strengthens the argument by many in the gay community that homosexuality is not a matter of choice, but of biological destiny.

Members of the gay community said the new study could help to change the perception of homosexuality.

"It may help people look at this as a genetic issue, that it is natural and it involves no sort of choice at all," said George Neighbors Jr. of the Federation of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays in Washington. "If you believe in God or nature, that's what homosexuality develops from."

In the other studies of biological bases for homosexuality, Simon LaVay, then of the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in San Diego, found in 1991 that a specific brain structure was smaller in homosexual males than in heterosexual males.

Studies in 1991 and 1993 at the Boston University School of Medicine of separated identical twins found a commonality of sexual orientation that suggested a genetic origin of homosexuality in men and women.

"We knew there was a genetic influence somewhere, but we didn't know where," said Dr. Richard Pillard, co-author of the twins studies and a professor of psychiatry at Boston University. "Now Hamer has come along and found an area on the X chromosome where he thinks there is an actual gene. His was the next logical step."

Hamer emphasized that his study does not show that a single gene determines sexual orientation.

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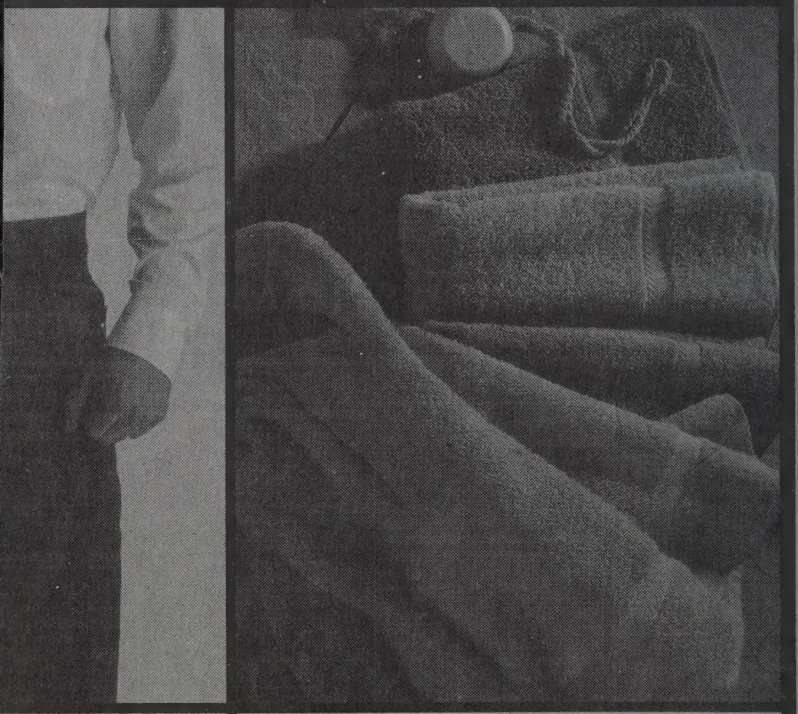
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